

Forbes Mill Addition
1 Block Northwest of Church and East Main Streets
Los Gatos
Santa Clara County
California

HABS No. CA-2062

HABS,
CAL,
43-LOSGA,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS NO. CA-2062

FORBES MILL ADDITION

Location: Between Highway 17 and Mill Street, Los Gatos, Santa Clara County, California.

Los Gatos Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 10.590530.4119780.

Present Owner: Forbes Mills Partnership
c/o Prometheus Development Corporation
Wolf Road, Cupertino, California.

Present Occupant
and Use: Vacant.

Significance: The Forbes flour mill is important as the birthplace of Los Gatos in 1854, when James Forbes built his flour mill here. The addition was built in 1880, adjoining the south wall of the original mill. The addition is one of the few remaining buildings in Santa Clara County built of rough-hewn local quartzitic sandstone blocks. It was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: 1880. The annex was added onto the original mill building of 1853-1855. The south wall of the extant structure is part of the earlier mill.
2. Original and subsequent owners: Description of property: County of Santa Clara, Assessor's Map, Book 529, page 28, March 1974. Parcel 13 containing 3.11 acres. The Forbes Mill site is bounded on the west by Highway 17, on the south by the rear line of the Main Street business properties, and on the north and east by the Los Gatos High School lands and the former Presbyterian Church property.

Chain of title: This is an incomplete chain of title.
December 1, 1855-November 29, 1856, James Alexander Forbes.
May 29, 1857-October 15, 1860, Gustave Touchard.
October 15, 1860-1862, Eugene Cazalis.

1862-1866, Samuels & Farmer.
1866-1912, Los Gatos Manufacturing Co.
1912-1955, Pacific Gas & Electric Co.
1955-1979, Set-Ro Co., Sacramento.
1979- , Forbes Mill Partnership.

3. Original plan and construction: The existing structure is a two-story storage annex added to the original four-story mill building in the fall of 1880 by W. H. Rogers, Dr. W. S. McMurtry, and Dr. McMurtry's son, George. (National Register Application.) Reportedly, the sandstone blocks were hauled from a quarry about 500 feet away.
4. Alterations: The Forbes Mill has been vacant since 1887 when flour milling ended. In 1915 Pacific Gas and Electric tore down the three top stories, and in 1929 the remaining story was razed. All that remains is the annex. Circa 1961 there were efforts to establish a Naval Museum in the Forbes Mill Addition, but due to lack of local support this failed. As the building is in such a deteriorated state, it is difficult to see what alterations have been made.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Mr. James Alexander Forbes of Santa Clara, California was the builder and first owner of the Santa Rosa Flour Mill. Forbes first arrived in California in October 1831, from South America. Having a university education, Forbes was one of the most educated persons in California at this time. Having served in many roles during these early years, Forbes was appointed the first British Vice Consul to Alta California in 1842-1852 after having written the first European description of Alta California in 1839.

Forbes' activities at his "Santa Rosa" Flour Mill are well documented by his letter books. In the one year of operations about 100,000 barrels of flour were milled. The main importance of the Forbes Mill is that it was the impetus which started the development of Los Gatos. Through the years the Forbes Mill complex has served as a flour and woolen mill, bottling company, ice storage facility, and as a sub-station for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

James Alexander Forbes, Unpublished letters and materials.
William A. Wulf, Historian, 230 San Mateo Avenue, Los
Gatos, California. In his private collection.

James Alexander Forbes Letters, (160 pages, 1877-1881).
Saratoga Historical Foundation, Saratoga, California.

Letter Book of James Alexander Forbes, Three volumes 1850-1879.
California State Library, Sacramento, California.

Lee, Robert Elton. National Register Form - Forbes Mill & Annex,
August 1977. Los Gatos Museum Association, P.O. Box 1904,
Los Gatos, California.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Bancroft, Hubert Howe. History of California. Lewis Publishing
Company. Chicago, Illinois. 1883-1892.

Bruntz, Dr. George C. History of Los Gatos, Valley Publishers,
Fresno, California, 1971.

Foote, H. A. Pen Pictures From the Garden of the World. Lewis
Publishing Company. Chicago, Illinois, 1888.

Munro-Fraser, J.P. History of Santa Clara County. 1881.

c. Interviews:

Allen, Fred. Tri-State Engineering, 555 Price Avenue,
Redwood City, California. By telephone 415-365-4850.
(Engineer for developer who apprised of current situation.)

Wulf, William A., historian. 230 San Mateo Avenue, Los Gatos,
California. July 1979.

Lee, Robert Elton, historian. 160 Masso Avenue, Los Gatos,
California. August 1979.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This rectangular building measures approximately 73'-6" x 32'. The building has no bay system and has two floors.
2. Foundations: The mill addition has stone foundations.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The building is made of stone.
4. Structural system, framing: The building is made of basaltic rock laid in courses forming bearing walls. There are interior

wooden columns and beams, which previously held up the second floor. There are wooden rafters supporting a greatly deteriorated plank sheathing.

Note: The description of this building explains the architecture of only the annex to the Forbes Mill. The older part of the Forbes Mill has been demolished. The south wall of the annex, however, does contain an original wall of the first mill.

5. Porches, stoops, and bulkheads: Concrete sidewalks ring the building, and there is a concrete bulkhead that once supported machinery outside the south elevation of the building.
6. Chimneys: None.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are two door openings on the north side of the building, one of which has a heavy metal rolling door covering it. Since this building is in ruin, there is no evidence of the nature of the doors or windows, we simply have the openings remaining. There are three window openings on the north elevation. On the south elevation, there is a door opening and three window openings. There is a door opening in the west elevation.
8. Roof: Wooden rafters support a flat roof that has been covered with tar paper.

B. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans. The annex has two rooms now. The larger room may be entered from a door on either the south, west, or north elevations. A smaller room, that has no windows may be reached from a door on the north elevation.
2. Stairways: None.
3. Flooring: The mill annex has concrete floors.

C. Site:

1. General setting: The mill sits in the valley of Los Gatos Creek, its original source of power. The Los Gatos Creek has become the road bed for Highway 17. The annex sits just yards from traffic, adjacent a large dirt parking lot for the local high school.
2. Historic landscaping design: None.
3. Outbuildings: A rock wall, that is part of the flume arrangement remains to the south of the building.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the County of Santa Clara. The 1979 summer project was completed under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS; Kenneth L. Anderson, Jr., Principal Architect; and Sybil Groff, Project Supervisor (Columbia University); with David Schaaf, Architectural Foreman (Carnegie Mellon University); Jan Cigliano (Oberlin College); and student architects William Coppa (University of Virginia), Jon Lourie (University of Maryland), Anne Munly (Princeton University), John Murphy (Texas Tech University), and Matthew Poe (Virginia Polytechnic University), at the HABS Field Office in Santa Clara, California. The drawings were edited in the HABS Washington Office in the summer of 1979 by architect David Schaaf. The historical and architectural data were edited by Jan Cigliano, an architectural historian on the HABS staff in 1979. Photographs were taken by photographer Jane Lidz in the summer of 1980.